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Bard

Suppose it was so
and the corner
where the cigar store
entertained us

Coronet the poor
man's Reader's Digest
pictures of women
a calendar a smell

of endlessly souring
milk for egg creams
the foam or fizz
the dry charlotte russe

fly buzz under glass
where we went
to smoke under the stands
nobody threw harder

than the Italians
I wonder why the grass
was always so dry
the first cigarettes

of childhood understood
a vital differencing
you are not
who you were

you are me now
darkless in summer
evenings no church
could tolerate this candle.

12 September 1994

Imagine less of it always sintered to the same rock,
left there when we've gotten up and gone back into the
sea too cold today for swimming. And by the way
where is the sea?

Notions of oceans. Prelude
to a wave falling back and being nameless water
beneath all the ripples on their way here from Japan.
You see me dream in pan-Pacific. Only the bare cliffs
of Ladakh dry and vast are any consolation to
all this ocean. The speakable. The friend
with colors on her walls inside. It seems we influence.
What we did to the dogs we do to all life soon,
lions will roar from our back porch to scare
the legions of the homeless from our Ownership.
All flesh aspires to be us. The woof of things
(librarian giggle, angels hide their empty eyes).
Even rocks catch diseases from us. This stone
for instance we sat on by the shore. Beach poppies
and wild sea roses, kelp at someone's feet and wind
does not take anything away. We read our names
in the newspaper and wonder who we are now.

13 September 1994

G A L A T E A

It wasn't much to ask:
to take off your clothes and stand
quiet while I touched you,
letting the hands (those scientists
of love) caress you

into some certain knowledge
that would ease my yearning
in the Eden of your body
for definings. But the hands
of love are heavy, you stood

away from such imputations
(never asked, never answered),
knew hands would lead
to congress, congress would make
laws, laws would bind you

and there would be an end
to the freshness of our knowing.
I suppose. I suppose it was that
that made you shudder calmly
in anticipation of what

I would not ask you would not give.
The world is made of falling.
Enough for you to stand there
fully clothed but standing
looking over my head

as if someone somewhere could
know you better than I do.
There is no art in it. It is the will
to stand, against the will to understand.
Nothing could be simpler than not.

13 September 1994 .

L A T I N

Salt on every part. As if a sailor (Nauta)
had brought back wounds from every port
and knew them as his body, forgetting bit by bit
which hurt was where and who she is and why.

Then he would be ordinary, as we are, the fools
he comes home to, victims of his dull practice
in English grammar, he has forgotten more than we know,
of course, but his sentences lead nowhere,

no image forms in our sociable minds while he rants
hour-long in local taverns and we listen,
nothing else to do, only a taste of salt in our mouths
as if the priest (Sacerdos) were busy all night long

baptizing each of us in someone's name with water and
words and harsh incomprehensible warnings.

14 September 1994

P O E T R Y

One can have no theory of this. It speaks itself, if it does at all, out of a whelming willingness to listen, listen to the mind's crosswords, associations, weary connections, tired habits, sudden breakings free from what I thought I thought.

It is rhyme without the sorry clang of like sounds. It is all the good and bad things Johnson meant by 'metaphysical' except that the clenches and propositions are not far-fetched, far from it, they are close, close, close as a blind man to his skin, and him listening.

Mostly it is listening to the mind. Overhearing what the mind is doing as it restlessly moves among its own history ('thinking') and the world around it ('perceiving') and its own responses to both of these parades ('feeling'). Mostly it is overhearing what is spoken. It is not part of this discussion to say who speaks, but only who listens. Listen. Over hearing, hyper-hearing. Let language listen.

Nothing stops, and nothing lasts. This is the freedom of the hour, the paradise that poetry is some guide to, robed in pleasant going, walking with you, you, as you in turn overhear what it says here, and how it chimes, rhymes, dangs, damp, dances, dunces, heaps, harps, hand-to-hands with what you are.

14 September 1994

As if the outside of the thing were leaking,
badly, and the interior was full of living things
who thought the sky was that dull glow
even further inside, at the limit of their fall,

the madness they named Up. Vessel
full of prisoners, ark around the rain, a voice
floating bird-like on choppy waves crying
some word rubbed out by the wind.

Nobody is listening.

....14 September 1994....

Some mystery of someone's real name.

A wheel goes by. We were attracted
to each strut of the framework,

ideas got in the way, this lucid lovely
sex called structure (sex inside a diamond).
We got lost in the structures we supposed,
you wanted boron I wanted
mercury,

 you sat in vapor
 till your lips turned red
 your hips ratcheted hard
 around some central image
that stuff had dreamed in your lap

your hips understood. And I was
all about quicksilver, the sheen
or poison or shine of it, the Changing Touch,
the touch that changes what it feels,
sex without penetration, orgasm
in every pore of skin. A wind
in the cellar of the mind
where you live in pure listening.

14 September 1994

Action questions.

Do you need your skin?
Is there an altar in your neighborhood.

Is there a way?
And nothing
by its nature
answers.

15 September 1994

I looked and it was gone. At least I looked.
The load of circumstance,
Dickens-wise, I trundle on my back

in sun. I carry things, I say language,
I look for one again. She is gone
from where she was. On Lüneberg Heath

sheep survive on heather. I carry more,
I say things. I come back and she is gone,
it is language where the verbs are missing.

It is far. It is north of us. It is near sleep.

15 September 1994

The neurons of finding still keep firing
after the thing is found. The place. Most
anguish comes from this. You have found
for example your between. No need

in burrow in between any open lips or wound.
Yet still do. Your predilection lets you,
that machine. Your grail is an excuse
for angry travel. No wonder you wear iron.
No wonder so many of you die along no way.

16 September 1994

Her name is her disaster her bad star
glows in the roots of her hair the pallor
of her eyes is that original sad light
that says her. We choose and choose.
Can't a queen be free from his try?

Is a sphinx? Aren't all her questions
built into the fact of things, things
in the first place, into the structure
of anyone who comes, comes to answer?

For answers are meat. She keeps calling,
like rain. It will not happen, don't let it
happen then it happens. The hook
comes out of her death and catches me.
Lust makes a perfume out of pity,
the city is a dialect of windows. Doorless,

done. I will sit here and listen to a horn,
a taxi calling for its fare. Functions
in one another's calculus, we sleep
this long response called Thinking.
I find no way to say it simple
so there is no song.

16 September 1994

The old man was called Le Jeune. Priest
that he was he was named Marius,
for the revolution. He was coming to America,
he was on the same boat, same cabin with me.
It is almost the end of the story. Old man
why to a raw country comes when no war sends?
The ship itself was meaningful, famous, old.
Each morning we examined our location on the chart
arguing plausibly were we fast or slow.
The ocean managed to look different every day
as if we were getting somewhere. A new country!
I never saw him say his prayers, but he was off
every morning early and I was not. I bled a lot
from a private wound, I drank a lot of wine.
On the third day out I understood the sea.

16 September 1994

Of course it's precious, the ordinary
thing to do with a minute
when time gets funny and the ordinary
disappears minute by minute
and you still hold on (brave soldier, blind
architect) to what you do. You live in time
by feel. You inhabit this house by habit.
In the dark. By feel. The precious
opportunity to be now. You live
in this dark house by ear.

17 September 1994

Getting begun. A little sky a little mist
no river yet. I will repeat the word
until the river comes
falling down the mountains to
meet this imaginary world.

17 September 1994 KTC

Measuring the implausible against the unreal
is like wearing a bright necktie Monday morning
in your face my friends the broken barricades
of the failed revolution. Nothing will work
until the last mountain falls down
and worships your weary cramponing feet.

18 September 1994 KTC

for Charlotte

Your hair, framing the serenity of, suddenly,
your face after a hard day, and the sun
was wind today, and they cleared ground
at the cliff edge for the stupa, sumac
whacked and chainsawed, mulberry, thorn brakes,
cleared and the river comes into view
the same way, suddenly, air
poured into air. Your hair in the light
above the table, bronze. The land,
the land cleared for the tall
enterprise of mind. Of whatever
it finally means to look. To look and not look away.

19 September 1994
Hyde Park

COLLOPS

Or scallopine. Collops
was the English word,
then scallops. Which
are fish now,
sort of, actually
mostly cookie-cutter
chunks of giant ray or
devilfish. Or veal.
Sometimes the only
thing that's real
is our resistance
to what they call it.

19 September 1994
Hyde Park

Why have we not landed on the moon?
Cardiac arrests. Swollen ankles. Measles.

That much is easy. We are not ready
even to be where we are.

20 September 1994

As if you needed to know any more about me!
So many of you in the dream last night
— a dream makes no one pregnant —
and grabbing with both hands the commonest fact
while the Gnomon at Alexandria measured the world
and the sea came in. Kept coming in. Even that meager
shallow isle-infested sea that keeps the desert back,
how beautiful it was to once to sail above it!
To plunge in knowing, the curt happiness of gods,
long anxious patience of the sea. She held
herself to me. Let dream decide.

21 September 1994

Time is the place for giving up, eternity for adaptation.
The sudden rose

(did she say sullen?)

branched from the tangle where the low stone wall
housed a scarlet snake, her sluggish messenger
meant to scare us in that beauty. He knew then
she would betray the Company. Her name
does not linger in this legend. For such, oblivion is best.

21 September 1994

